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THE PRESENT PROBLEM OF THE SUPPLY AND THE TRAINING OF THE CHRISTIAN MINISTRY IN ENGLAND

ALFRED E. GARVIE
New College, University of London, England

The problem of the ministry in England is at present very serious and urgent. It is twofold. Not only is the supply of candidates inadequate for the needs of the churches, but the need of change in the methods of training is being widely felt and freely discussed. Even before the war the problem existed, but the war has made it very much more acute. For nearly four years no students, with a few insignificant exceptions, have been admitted to the theological colleges, and the courses of most of those already in college have been interrupted by military service or other forms of national work. The churches have not made any endeavor to secure exemption for their students and are already being confronted with and will still more have to face an alarming shortage in the numbers of thoroughly trained men to carry on the work of the ministry. The knowledge which it has been possible to gain of religion and morals in the army has brought home to the churches a fact that might have been known before, that the majority of men are, if not hostile, at least indifferent to the churches and to their testimony and influence. And there has been much searching of heart. If the churches are not reaching the masses of the nation, what is wrong in their methods of work? How far is the

ministry to be blamed? And what defects have there been in training men for the ministry? It is felt that the close of the war will offer an opportunity, unexampled in its extent and importance, for the churches to do all they can in the work of reconstruction. It may interest readers of this *Journal* in America, where the same problem essentially will arise, to know what is being thought and done about it in England.

I

It is hoped, and there are good grounds for the hope, that there will be a considerable number of men offering themselves to the colleges for training, especially for foreign mission work. While the experience of warfare has turned a few from their purpose to be Christian ministers, in a far larger number the influence has been to awaken or to quicken the desire to do work for the Kingdom of God which will in the future forbid the repetition of the horrors and calamities which have lately been experienced. The heads of the theological colleges are receiving letters of inquiry from the camps which give proof of such a movement. The men who have passed through the ordeal, moral and religious, of the war and emerge enriched in Christian experience and strengthened in Christian character will have the quality that will be needed in the coming days of stress and strain. There has been a great deal of discussion as to the special kind of training to be given to these men, but this subject will more fittingly be discussed in the second part of this essay. We need not then fear a permanent shortage of men for the ministry, although for three or four years after the war is over it may continue to be a serious question for the churches.

There is a danger in the present situation against which the churches may be forearmed by being forewarned. There is always a considerable number of men who desire to do the work of the ministry but are either unprepared or unqualified to undergo the training that is required. While there are exceptional cases of even extraordinary success on the part of untrained men, yet the majority of these men are not so gifted that they can do without training; and one may even venture to say that gifted men lose nothing but gain much by training. There has been even in the denominations

that allowed greater liberty, some would say even laxity, in the admission of such untrained men to the ministry, a tightening up of the rules for admission and a raising of the standard required, and it would be a serious injury to the churches if this progress were arrested, and if, under the pressure of a temporary emergency, the door of admission were again opened as widely as it once was. Yet if the colleges do not provide the churches with a sufficient number of men for their needs, it will be difficult to resist the demand that, at least temporarily, rules may be relaxed. The men admitted to meet the need of the moment would not be ready to withdraw when the need was met but would remain a permanent hindrance, in some cases at least, to the more efficient discharge of the duties of the ministry. As will be shown in the second part the need of the time is a more and not less efficient and consequently trained ministry.

It has been suggested that the shortage might be met without any real loss to the permanent interests of the Kingdom of God by a smaller number of churches. It must be admitted that in many villages and small towns there is a serious overlapping and consequent waste of effort, with even here and there the evils of jealousy, rivalry, and competition. In one town there may be two or even three Congregational or Baptist churches, where one building would be quite large enough to hold all who attend. In the villages different denominations have chapels, when there is need and room only for one. The relations of the free churches to one another are becoming so cordial and intimate that we have reason for believing that a serious effort will be made to remedy this defect; but the fact just mentioned, that there is overlapping in the same denomination, shows how difficult it is to avoid it with regard to different denominations. The widespread and deep-rooted movement toward Christian unity will, it may be hoped, more and more lessen this evil in the time to come. The present emergency has forced the pace, and denominations are now combining for common worship which would never have been induced to take such a step before. But the problem cannot be solved completely in this way. The greatest cities are not over-churched, and the world as a whole needs not less but more, and more earnest and competent

ministry from the churches. It is the hope and desire of the best men in all churches that they will be called and fitted to do a far greater work in the land than it has hitherto ever entered into their minds to conceive or expect. Very much of that work will be done by men and women not in the ordained ministry, and the peril of a one-man ministry in each church must certainly be avoided; but teachers and leaders for the workers will be needed, who give their whole time, strength, and gifts to their calling, and who have had the most thorough preparation for it that can be secured by them.

There are some who are looking, if not for a solution of the problem, yet for some relief in the present distress to the recognition of the ministry of women. The "woman" movement has been greatly advanced by the war, owing to the indispensable and invaluable service rendered by women in spheres hitherto closed to them. With this growing economic and political independence there has been awakened in not a few women the desire for greater moral and religious independence. It would be impossible adequately to estimate the value of the services rendered by women in the Christian churches; but with few exceptions the more responsible offices of the churches have been reserved for men. But highly educated and spiritually minded young women are feeling that the church does not offer them full opportunity for the free use of their talents and are turning to other forms of public service to give them what the church denies. Does not the shortage of men for the work of the churches supply the instant occasion for a serious consideration of their demand, which in any circumstances deserves the most respectful treatment?

Most churches do make and will continue to make a distinction between the ordained and the unordained ministry. There are churches in which there is no present prospect of the admission of women to the ordained ministry; but others are ready to consider the question. It has been decided that there is nothing in the Constitution of the Congregational Union of England and Wales to debar a woman from ordination; and one woman has been ordained after completing the regular course of training at a theological college. A conference of representatives of the theological colleges (Congregational) resolved to recommend to the colleges

“that provision be made by the colleges for the training of women for the Christian ministry on the same terms as men.” Ancient trust deeds may, however, stand in the way of granting scholarships to women, and it may be necessary to try to secure new scholarships without any restrictive conditions as regards sex. What is to be insisted on, however, is that women shall be expected to reach as high a standard as men in their training. That does not mean that some subjects taught to men may not be omitted and some specially suitable for women be added, but it does mean that the way into the ministry must not be made easier for women than for men. Not only would this put women in the odious position of “blacklegs,” but it would in the long run be injurious to the women themselves, who for efficiency need the training at least as much as men. It is not probable, however, that the number of women seeking to enter the ordained ministry, even when it is open to them, will be large. Only a few will be ready to submit to the training from five to seven years. Most women happily still look to the home as their sphere. Not less but more than ever after the war will there be need of Christian wifehood and motherhood. Nature has appointed that thus woman can render the highest service to the race. Perhaps there may be found a few women capable of combining the Christian ministry with the full responsibilities of the home. In many of the churches there is a strong feeling, especially among the women, against a woman ministry; and in any case women will not replace men in sufficient numbers to meet the whole need of the hour, and, fully trained, they will not be ready for the present emergency.

It is being recognized, however, that outside of the ordained ministry there is a great need of and much room for a varied service of women in the churches. In Sunday-school work, in social service, in pastoral visitation, the labors of the ordained ministry can be supplemented and supported by the efforts of women. For such work it is being recognized that training is no less necessary; and steps are being taken in several of the churches to provide training for women who might be willing to devote themselves to such tasks of Christian love. It will not duplicate the regular theological training but be adapted to the kind of service intended.

II

If the number of men available will be fewer, it is all the more necessary that they should be well trained and trained especially in two new directions: (1) leadership in the manifold forms of service which must in increasing measure fall on the membership of the churches if they are to fulfil their part in the community; and (2) personal competence to do the kind of work—educational, social, and moral—which the new conditions will demand, but which has so far either not been done at all or been done without adequate preparation to do it efficiently. There has been a gradual and yet certain development of opinion that the curriculum of the theological colleges which has come down to this generation needs modification. Progressive colleges here and there have been trying to face the present position with such resources as they can command. But it is being realized that more needs to be done than has as yet seemed at all practicable, and by mutual counsel and help the theological colleges are endeavoring to accomplish what it hitherto seemed even rash to attempt.

We must distinguish between measures which it may be necessary to take to meet the immediate emergency, the measures which must be taken in the new conditions, and the fresh realization which has come to many of what these new conditions mean for the permanent improvement of the training of the ministry. It is recognized that it will be impossible to ask men whose course at college has been interrupted for three or four years to resume it and complete it as if there had been no such break in its continuity. Very much ground in the way of knowledge will have been lost, and it will take a long time to recover slowly, as, for instance, in linguistic proficiency. Interests will have been awakened which will make most of the regular course appear a wearisome drudgery. An experience will have been gained and character formed amid the trying conditions of warfare which will to some extent at least compensate for a shorter than the usual period of training. This consideration will apply also to those who had not begun their course when called to military or other forms of service, and the delay in the commencement of their course must also be allowed for. Two conditions, however, must be observed: (1) that none shall be allowed the

modified course who have not had some kind of personal discipline which might be taken as in some sense an equivalent of the additional time spent in training; (2) that as regards practical efficiency in the ministry the modified course shall provide an adequate training. It is in the more distinctively academic side of the education that for a time at least some changes must, however reluctantly, be made, and for only such time as appears imperative.

I can from personal knowledge testify what a difference in Christian experience and character and consequent competence for the work of this ministry the painful discipline of warfare can make. Students who left as boys in outlook and ways return either from military service itself, or from Y.M.C.A. work, mature men with an insight, moral and religious, and a capacity for service which an academic training alone could never have given them. While it does seem imperative that a knowledge of Greek sufficient to allow an intelligent, scholarly study of the New Testament must, as far as is at all practicable, be insisted upon for all students for the Christian ministry, yet, where the acquisition of languages is difficult, Hebrew must be surrendered; but this must be compensated for by a more thorough instruction in the history, theology, and ethics of the Old Testament. Latin too must go, but some knowledge of classical literature, if only in translations, ought to take its place. A knowledge of the contents of the Bible, the great truths and duties of the Christian gospel, and the main features of the history of the church must be imparted. As it is not improbable that this class of man will not be attracted by scholarship so much as by the practical work of the ministry, training for that must be given in so scientific a way that it will serve as the mental discipline which a man must undergo if he is to have any pretensions to education. For instance, Sunday-school work must be based on psychology and pedagogy, and social reform on economics as well as ethics. Some of the colleges are already preparing curricula which will fulfil these requirements.

Turning now from the emergency to the regular curriculum, teachers of progressive outlook see at the present moment an opportunity for effecting reforms which it might have taken years to bring about, for conservatism finds a refuge even in theological

colleges; and it is not easy to get the churches so interested in the education of the ministry as to make adequately articulate, as is being done under the present pressure, the demand for the kind of ministers that they need. Several general considerations must be offered rather than details discussed.

1. While common sense would lead any teacher to recognize differences in interest, taste, and capacity in his scholars, the surer insight that psychology gives is leading to more accurate discrimination. It is being recognized that it is now impossible to force all the students into the same mold of preparation. There are men who come to college and very speedily show that they are qualified for scholarly pursuits. The capacity of some is specially linguistic, of others philosophical or scientific. Few there are who desire to make "all knowledge their province." The curricula in theological colleges hitherto have leaned unduly to the linguistic side. Science especially has a claim for further recognition as at least a preparation for the theological course. But any change in this direction is confronted with two difficulties: First, it seems to me that a man has not been properly trained for the Christian ministry who does not know enough Greek to read his New Testament in the original with interest and intelligence. Secondly, I have learned from experience with some of my students how difficult it is for any man who has had a predominantly scientific training to turn to the study of even one language. That a man who knows both Latin and Greek will use English words of classical origin with a finer appreciation of their exact meaning must be admitted, and to give up one of them is educationally a loss. But no less is it a loss for a man to be shut out altogether from the realm of science. The study of even one science is an invaluable discipline of the mind as well as an added interest for the life. Undue specialization in the arts course which should lead up to the theological is to be deprecated. While special aptitude must be recognized, a one-sided development must, if possible, be avoided. The Christian minister must be not merely a specialist in theology but a cultured man, and the wider the culture that is the setting of his specialism the better even for his theology. While there are theological teachers who regard a preparation in philosophy as rather a disadvantage to

their students, and while it must be recognized that there are philosophies that engender a bias against theology, yet it does seem to me that a theology which is not second-hand but first-hand can only be won by a man for himself, and not borrowed from others, when he has learned how to think things together as philosophy will teach him. Greater variety, however, is an insistent demand in the theological curriculum even on its more academic side.

2. The Christian minister of today is required to render far more varied services in his church and through his church to the community than the minister of a former generation. Sunday-school work, social reform, and moral guidance of society claim his instructed and intelligent support. Pastoral theology and homiletics do not exhaust the subjects which must be included in his practical training. He cannot be an expert in all these subjects, but he can at least know enough about them not to be either the foe or the slave of the experts. His preaching will gain from the knowledge of psychology and pedagogy which will enable him to lead competently the workers in his Sunday school. A study of economics will save him from making in the pulpit rash and foolish utterances into which his social sympathies, unregulated by knowledge, might betray him; and he will be the better able to guide the social service of the members of his church into the more profitable channels. Modern society needs moral leadership, the application of Christian principles to the complex conditions in which we find ourselves. No man's individual conscience is competent of itself to solve the many difficult problems. There must be a study of the science of ethics and the history of man's moral development, combined with a scholarly study and not merely a literalist interpretation of the New Testament. For students preparing for the mission field the practical training must be specialized. I have dealt with this topic in the *International Review of Missions* and cannot now discuss it further. There are several subjects which this class of students *must* know, and which men being trained for the home ministry would also be the better for knowing, that must be mentioned—the psychology of religion, the comparative study of religions, and the history of Christian missions. Some teachers fear that if a larger place is given to these subjects of

practical training the education will be less scholarly. We must enlarge our view of scholarship, and we must recognize that all these subjects are beginning to be dealt with in a less empirical and a more scientific way than formerly, although there is still room for progress. We must learn how to combine the practical and the academic so that "the man of God may be thoroughly furnished unto every good work." A greater variety of subjects must be included in the curriculum than hitherto.

3. There are students whose tastes are scholarly and students whose bent is practical, and the ministry has room and need for both. It is much to be desired that there be opened to scholars more posts in which they can use their talents for the enrichment of the knowledge and thought of the world. The churches should aspire to provide intelligent leadership as well as moral guidance, religious influence, and social service; and the theological colleges will not fulfil their part unless they give the scholarly student every help and encouragement. It is waste of effort, however, to try to make scholars out of the majority of students who offer themselves for the ministry. The experience of conversion, on the one hand, and the passion for souls, which are with many the desire and motive in the purpose to preach the gospel which bring them there, do not usually include any special aptitude for scholarship. The fact should be frankly recognized. Time that is now spent on Hebrew which is forgotten almost as soon as the college is left behind could be much more profitably employed in making them proficient for the particular tasks that await them. There are limits to human capacity and endurance, and we must give up the attempt to teach all the students all the subjects which should properly be included in a theological curriculum, or to carry them all on to the same stage of proficiency even in the subjects that each is taught. There must be no slackness allowed, and thoroughness must be required; but this demand, necessary even for the moral character of the students, can be made justly only when due account has been taken of a man's tastes and capacities.

4. Such a varied and adapted curriculum will make large demands on the scanty resources of the colleges. We in Great Britain look with envy to some of the theological colleges in America

with their large staffs of professors and lecturers. Four or five teachers is the maximum our colleges possess. There is a movement to relieve, if not altogether to remove, this defect which is of interest in itself. Many of the theological colleges have some kind of connection with the universities and so can take advantage of their teachers for the arts training and even, although this is not common, for some theological subjects. The colleges connected with a university, although of different denominations, are, as far as is practicable, co-operating, so that the combined staff may be able to provide a greater variety of subjects and preserve the necessary specialization by individual teachers. A proposal of this kind is being put into shape just now by three London colleges, Hackney, New (Congregationalist), and Regent's (Baptist); and it is hoped not only that provision will be made for greater variety in the ordinary curriculum, but that instruction will be afforded in post-graduate, advanced studies which may attract students from elsewhere. The horizon is widening, and we are now thinking of closer co-operation in future between the colleges throughout the British Commonwealth and the colleges of the United States of America. It were well if the bond that is so closely drawing together all the English-speaking peoples were made even closer, not only by common moral and religious interests, but also by their rational interpretation in a Christian theology which could offer leadership in the things of God to the world.